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For the Herald.

LIFE:

AN ALLEGORY.

'Tis morn:—Night's stars are fading fast
From out the boundless blue,
And a halo lights the orient hills
With a soft and silvery hue,
The feathery mist hangs o'er the lake
And veils its glassy floor,
And marks the winding river's course,
And hides its verdant shore.
Now softly sighing from the vale
The morning zephyr springs,
And richly fraught with breath of flowers
It plys its gentle wings.
And now the distant hills gleam out
With gilt and redd'ning peaks;
And Sol's bright arrows from on high
Both mount and valleys seek.
The fresh'ning breeze speeds o'er the lake
And lifts the misty veil,
While slowly we unmoor our bark
And spread the snowy sail;
And now the dancing waves sweep by,
Light springing from our prow,
And sunny hills and meadows green,
In beauty greet us now.

'Tis Morn:—how bright the golden sun
Casts down his arrowy rays,
As lightly o'er the middle lake
Our bark speeds on its way:
And now we pass a fairy isle,
High crown'd with waving trees,
From whence there comes a melody
Of birds and hum of bees.
How clear the waters open down
Beneath our fairy bark,
And see the gliding silver-fish
Shines brightly from the dark:
And then far o'er the glancing waves
We see the winding shore,
And golden hills peep over hills
Till lost in mountains hoar.

And now 'tis Eve:—the sun hath sunk
Behind the mountain's crest,
And softly float the pearly clouds
Far in the rosy west:
Dark shadows stretch across the lake,
And veil its smiling shores,
And sunlit robes and chrystal streams
Are darkly curtained o'er.
The dying breeze now scarcely fills
Our loosely hanging sails,
As gliding slowly o'er the deep
Our sheltring bay we hail;
Now fades the blushes of the sun,
Night's darkling shades have come,
Yet brightly shines the evening star
And guides us to our home.

C. W. P.

Pawlet, Oct. 1841.

THE TERROR OF PESTILENCE.

One circumstance, among the many of a touching character which attends the presence of a mortal epidemic in a city, is thus referred to in the New Orleans Picayune of the 12th ult.:

"THE UNATTENDED HEARSE. Among the many scenes to be now daily witnessed in this city, which excite our sympathy, awaken our commiseration, or enlist our pity, an unattended hearse, as it bears its lifeless burden to the grave, calls up most quickly, from the recesses of the heart, thoughts shrouded in sorrow, feelings robed in regret.

When we see that one-horse sombre vehicle driven by, when we observe the indifference with which the black driver hurries along to the grave-yard with his pulseless passenger, when we behold not a soul following after, to perform the last sad rites o'er departed friendship, or to place even the most simple mark of recognition over the deceased's grave, we feel that the inhabitant of that rough unornamental coffin died a desolate stranger!

But we know not how he lived—whether his journey, even from the cradle to the grave, was one continued pilgrimage of privation—whether he was once the inheritor of wealth, the possessor of consequence, surrounded by butterfly friends, who deserted him when the summer of his prosperity passed away—or whether some loving wife, affectionate mother, or kind-hearted sister, is not anticipating his return to a home long deserted, to friends long estranged, at the very time when his dust is being committed to dust, by a strange hand, in the swamps of New Orleans!

We never see an unattended funeral but we feel that we float through life on the ocean of uncertainty ourselves; and at such a time we pray Heaven to avert from us a death so distasteful—a grave so gloomy; we pray, if it should not be vouchsafed to us to die among our kindred, that we may at least be permitted to breathe our last where we are known—among our friends."

POPULAR READINGS.

From the Metropolitan for Sept.

THE COUNTESS AND HER FRIENDS.

A Tale of Coquetry.

BY WARNER OLIPHANT.

When I went abroad, the hope of enjoying the society of an old college friend, Ned Hayleigh, with whom I had long been on terms of the most confidential intercourse, induced me to go forthwith to Milan. Had I reflected on his confirmed social habits, some hesitation might have delayed this step; I should have remembered that wheresoever Ned Hayleigh was, there was no room for the indulgence of a moody humor, since he was an infallible attractor of all the merry spirits like himself that came within his sphere, and one was certain to find him the centre of as riotous a group as ever gave food for the police sheet of Bow-street office, or trouble to the panting proctors of our Alma Mater. As it proved, however, my seeking him was the wisest course that could possibly have been adopted, for under the very worst circumstances high spirits are more or less contagious, and the melancholy that might have nursed itself into madness, frequently gives way before the exhilarating influence of surrounding mirth. Poor Ned! a finer fellow never breathed; he would have dared earth and sea to serve a friend, and so well was his warm nature appreciated, that his friends would, one and all, have done their utmost to serve him in turn. He was drowned some years after in Norway, and there lies his dust.

'Noll, my dear boy,' said he, when I joined him, 'you are as welcome as if you brought news of a legacy. Sit down here, old fellow. Dined, I suppose? Sullivan, shove round the bottle. Grimmett, bring glasses. Sullivan, Jack, Forby, Macneil, Wilson—my friend Warner Oliphant.'

This brief introduction paved the way to a delightful addition to my circle of acquaintance. Forby had been our cotemporary at St. John's; Major Sullivan was a stranger, but I had known his brother; Macneil and Wilson were new faces, but being very young, very merry, and very good natured, were familiar at once, and intimates in an hour.

'We are to adjourn to the *la Scala*,' said Macneil, a young Scotch *laird*; 'are you inclined to join us? You will hear the finest singing in Italy to-night, if Hayleigh permits you to listen.'

'Very true,' said Major Sullivan. 'Velluti was in magnificent voice at rehearsal, though I prophesy that this '*Aureliano*' will disappoint the hopes of its stripling composer. The thing will be a failure, unless that wonderful voice, with its incomparable power and execution, avails to save it. However, with Velluti you do not risk a disappointment.'

'And as all the world will be there,' said Wilson, 'you can have a catalogue with notes and illustrations of all the mentionables in Milan. It will be a vast saving of time to you in that preliminary branch of your education.'

'I shall be delighted to visit a theatre which has the credit of being the first in the world. Let me finish my glass of claret, and I am much at your service.'

After a few minutes' further conversation, we rose to go. 'Ned,' I heard Sullivan say, 'you know it is quite against rule to allow your friend to sit with us; that is, in the Society's box at least.'

'Nonsense! I will be his surety that he joins us in a week,' said Hayleigh.

'In that case we may for once break the rule,' said Sullivan. 'The fact is,' he added, turning to me, 'the *Amici*, a society to which we all belong but you, has a box at *la Scala*; and we have agreed to suspend our rule against the admission of strangers in your favor; Hayleigh here will explain the somewhat unusual method of gaining admittance, should you desire to become one of us.'

In half an hour we were all seated in the theatre, enjoying the second act of Rossini's *Aureliano*, and surveying the varied and numerous audience. There was only one person in our box besides our own party; he was a young man who seemed to take very little interest in the opera, and a great deal in a box on the same tier as ours, but the opposite side. I concluded he was one of the *Amici*.

'Pray, Oliphant,' said Ned, 'where did you pick up that funeral aspect? You are not dressed in mourning, or I should fancy your grand-aunt had died. "Where gottest thou that goose look?"'

'Do not ask me now; you shall hear the story soon, and a fearful one it is. But come, tell me how one is admitted to the privileges of this society; I have serious thoughts of becoming a member. Are you any relations to the 'Arcadians,' or the 'Ozioni' or the 'Umidi?'

'None in the least, except that our title, like those of the fantastic corporations you name, embodies a joke. Look across the theatre—there—in a line with the chandelier—and tell me what you see.'

'I see a very beautiful girl, of diminutive figure, sating alone, and stealing frequent glances at this side—to this very box.'

'No wonder,' said Ned, 'for she is the patroness of the *Amici*.'

'That is the Countess V.,' said Macneil, 'a rich widow of a poor Italian count, aged nineteen in years, but twice nineteen in cunning. She is an English girl, and her father kept a fruit-shop on the Strand. She traveled in Italy after his death, and met Count V. who fell in love with her to distraction; if she did not love him she was delighted with his title, and her mother, captivated with his moustache, gave consent to a marriage. At seventeen she was a bride, at eighteen a widow, and now all the English in Milan seem anxious to make her a bride at nineteen.'

'But what has this history to do with the *Amici*?' I inquired.

'Wait a little,' proceeded Macneil. 'She is said to have killed the Count; for, the little creature being so selfish that to love any one but herself is an impossibility, he grew miserable at finding his raptures unrequited, pined to a shadow, and a fever, which he caught at Rome, made him an easy prey. Her fortune is very large, but there is no chance of her lavishing it on any one who cannot give her an English title in return.'

'But what has this,' I asked again, 'to do with the *Amici*?'

'Why this,' said Sullivan, 'that all the members of this our band of friends are declared lovers of the Countess V.'

'I should rather have expected to find you disposed to cut each other's throats than to go shares in an opera-box,' returned I.

'A reasonable expectation enough,' said Ned; 'but the truth is, not one of us cares the value of an opera ticket about her, nor she about us; so we wisely make common cause of it, and laugh at the little woman in unison.'

'Then you call yourselves *the Friends*, from no other reason than that you are *Rivals*. Is it so?'

'No; you do not quite catch the joke,' said Macneil. 'When I came to Milan, long before Ned Hayleigh and the rest, I met the fair countess, and fell, to confess the truth, in love with her—real—real *bona fide* love.'

'To which the attractions of her fifty thousand pounds in the three per cents did not add one jot,' said Sullivan.

'No more they did, for I knew nothing of her fortune. Now she gave me every sort of encouragement, squeezed my hand when we parted, spouted sentiment like a strolling player, told me of her likes and dislikes, cautioned me against this woman and that, made anxious inquiries about my prospects, invited me to her *bijou* of a house; and by so doing, effectually turned my head.'

'What did the woman mean?' said I.

'Perhaps she meant to have some one to wait upon her, to pelt her with compliments on fine eyes and ankles; perhaps—'

'Perhaps,' broke in Sullivan, 'she took a Scotch *laird* for a real live lord, and when your friends called you Strathgowan, she tho't you heir apparent to a Scotch peerage.'

'Very true,' said Macneil; 'the little creature is mad upon titles and acres. She would sell herself to old Nick, if he were introduced to her as the Duke of Tartarus. However, I made love to her, and offered myself; she held up her little hands with affected surprise, vowed and protested she had no suspicion of such a thing, and gave me to understand that any return of my affection was out of the question. Though this was a bit startling by way of catastrophe to one's first love, I had sense enough left to see that at any rate I was well out of her clutches; I made no comment, but briefly informed her of my intention of leaving Milan. 'Why leave Milan?' said my countess, 'I shall always be most happy to know you as a friend, and in that view there is no one I would so highly esteem.' A man in love is rather vulnerable to civil speeches, and a few reiterations of this made me promise to remain; if I could not be her husband, and perhaps some high principle, remorse or affection for her departed lord, stood in the way, it was something to be her friend, the friend of such a woman—yes, I would remain.'

'Go on,' said I, impatient to hear the drift of the story.

'Soon after I met Sullivan. We talked about the Countess V.; and at last I took him into my confidence, told him of my love and its issue, and how I was the firmest and *chosen* friend of the woman I adored, but could not marry. The major laughed heartily, and disconcerted me not a little. 'Forgive my rudeness, but the fact is, that your story is the exact counterpart of what occurred to me, and I too am the most esteemed of the countess among her friends.' This was startling, but it was exactly true; so I echoed the laugh, though it seemed somewhat against myself.—Wilson here joined the circle, and the major one day made a bet of a hundred that, if he proposed the result would be the same.'

'And lost,' said I, 'for the credit of poor human nature.'

'No, by Jove! I won,' said Sullivan, 'and might have done so in half a dozen other cases, but one does not like to take advantage of moral certainties.'

'Well,' said Macneil, 'we learned to enjoy the thing, and set on two or three other fellows to become her friends. At last Sullivan proposed that we should form a club, to be called the *Amici*, no one to be permitted the privileges of membership until he had made love to the countess, and been denominated by her the most esteemed of her friends.'

'So then, you have your name, not by virtue of being friends to each other, but to the Countess V.?'

'Exactly,' answered Macneil; 'and now what do you think of the lady?'

'That a lady who can desire to be surrounded closely by men who have longed for her as a wife, is just little better than——'

'Than our worthy patroness,' chimed in Ned Hayleigh. 'Don't croak, Noll; you hardly appreciate the dear creature yet. There are women so fond of admiration that they cannot bear to part with an adorer & to whom it would be death to see the discarded one swell the train of another fair; yet so conceitedly selfish, that they would never bestow purse and person on one who is not able to give them more than an equivalent—such is our countess. As for love, you might as well expect love from a drumstick.'

'But does she not find out you are laughing at her?' I inquired.

'You do not know how blind one may become through vanity,' said the major.

'She thinks we are all dying for her still, whilst in truth we are only dying of laughter. Did you remark the man who sat in this box when we came in? he is now at her side.'

I looked up, and saw him conversing earnestly with the lady opposite.

'That is Lord Mildworth; he insists on endeavoring to become a member, yet I feel convinced that if he proposes she will accept him at once, without a single hint about friendship. She knows he will be an earl one day soon.'

'And now,' said Hayleigh, 'that you understand the constitution of our society, will you become a member? You know I have become your surety, and if not, shall forfeit my recognizances.'

'The proposal is somewhat novel,' answered I; 'but she must be worth knowing at least, for the rarity of the thing; so introduce me to-night, and you shall have my answer in the morning.'

'Agreed,' said Ned. 'Here, Sullivan!—Sullivan is master of the ceremonies by right of seniority—take him round, and do the proper.'

As we entered the countess's box, Lord Mildworth was just quitting it. I was introduced by Sullivan, who remained for a time, and then lounged away. Now that I had a nearer view of the heroine of my sketch, and patroness of the society, I could not help confessing that it was no wonder men should be fooled and enchained by one so charming.—She was of fair complexion, contrasting well with the blackest of bright eyes; her hair, braided back, showed the contour of a face to which nothing could be objected. Her figure was admirable, but very diminutive; if one had thought of her at one's fireside, it would have been as an ornament to one's chimney-piece, not to one's chimney corner. Nor was her conversation inferior to her appearance; under a light and sparkling manner she concealed attainments by no means inconsiderable. Her criticisms on music and musicians struck me as, for a woman, quite wonderful; and as she now and then trilled part of an air, to remind me of some opera we were speaking of, which I had forgotten, I could clearly see that her taste and voice were highly cultivated. O woman! woman! if such an outside could cloak a coarse and selfish mind, what shall save men from being deceived and betrayed? All love is a lottery; and the prizes of our hopeful boyhood prove blanks to our manly age. The first indication of something insincere in this beautiful specimen of nature's workmanship was afforded by her *theatrical* manner, that is, by a straining after effect in every word she uttered, ay, even in every position she assumed. Like most vain women, too, (for *men* sometimes succeed in concealing vanity,) she was ever and anon endeavoring to make the conversation turn upon herself, and although this was often adroitly effected, it was not so invariably. But these traits might have passed unnoticed if I had not been prepared for watchfulness by the communicative disclosures of the *Amici*. Before the end of the evening we were making love; talking of Petrarch as if she had been a Laura and I her lover. As I handed her into her English carriage, she invited me to visit her next day.

Not to weary you—in a week I found I had prosecuted my sham suit so ardently, that all was ripe for what Hayleigh termed my nomination. I had some qualms of conscience at acting a falsehood, even with one whose own creed was so unscrupulous, but these I silenced by the argument that I was contributing to the well earned punishment of a heartless and cruel woman. In short, the declaration of love was made, and received exactly in the usual form; I was rejected, but consoled with a proffer of friendship to any amount. What can such women mean by friendship? What conception can they form of the word they so constantly profane? Friendship proper dares death and scorns labor, for the sake of those it has chosen; and such friendship I have witnessed and can understand. But compare with this the friendship such creatures as the Countess V. have to offer: it is as like the true as Punch is to Hercules.

We knew we had the power of frightening our heroine out of Milan any moment we chose, and as power is often more delightful *in posse* than in *esse*—the consciousness than the exercise—we could scarcely make up our minds to do so. If it had not been for Lord Mildworth, who was to be the next candidate, it is hard to say how long our *Societa degli Amici* might have gone on increasing; but he brought the matter to a hurried close. Much struck both with the person and intellectual gifts of the lady, Mildworth entered upon the joke with eagerness and delight; he was in fact a little in love, however, he might affirm the contrary. But, a confirmed aristocrat, he had no thoughts of marrying a fruiterer's daughter; and, a man of sound sense, he would have spurned the idea of an union with one who showed such a fondness for being conspicuous, and who was already the laughing-stock of all his acquaintance. Now Major Sullivan was right in his belief that Mildworth had only to ask her hand to obtain it; she had resolved from the first to secure him if possible and it was the proudest moment of her life that saw him at her feet. On this chance, strange to say, his thoughtless lordship had never calculated, and when he heard a soft and simpered consent to his solicitations, nothing could exceed his surprise, except his embarrassment. The Countess V. must have thought him a gawky lover, for instead of receiving her gentle confession by pressing her incomparable hand to his licensed lips, and whatever else accepted suitors do, he sat on his chair in dumb amaze, revolving in his mind the best means of escape and emancipation; he was what your friend Tollett would call 'planted.' Invention refused to befriend him; and at last, in utter despair, he pressed her hand, gave his forehead a couple of slaps, and rushed from the room, the beautiful Agnes being left in the belief that her last new worshiper was afflicted with temporary derangement.

Peals of laughter saluted Mildworth when he told us his story. Never was description more vivid, never one more applauded than his, of his discomfiture; and his distress was as real at his acceptance, as any other lover's could have been who had undergone the pains of rejection.

'If she find you as cold every day,' said Sullivan, 'she will be forced to own she is beaten at her own weapons.'

'Oh, never fear,' gasped Hayleigh, just recovering from a convulsion. 'Lord Angelo is precise, stands at a guard with envy, scarce confesses that his blood flows, or that his appetite is more to flesh than stone;' but these cold gentlemen have a good deal of earnestness on occasion. It will be a match yet.'

'Come now, confess,' said Wilson; 'you did kiss her, did you not?'

'Upon my soul, no!' said Mildworth, with an eagerness that renewed our laughter.

'Since the days of Adonis, never was such forbearance;' replied Wilson.

'There will infallibly be work for the lawyers,' pursued Major Sullivan. ''Breach of promise of marriage. The Countess V. *vs* John Lord Mildworth. This was an action, &c.; verdict, damages £10,000.''

'A truce with all this,' said Mildworth, somewhat annoyed. 'How am I to get out of this unlucky scrape? I would rather make love to all Milan than that single affair should get wind.

'If I had not seen how all might be satisfactorily terminated,' returned Sullivan, 'I for one should not have laughed. But the thing is easy. Wilson is a beautiful draughtsman, and conceived the idea from a volume he has seen, called *Julia's Garland*, which some amorous French duke prepared for his mistress as a love offering—a plan for showing the countess how well we knew her. He has drawn all our pictures, seven in number—yours will make eight—and caused them to be bound in a handsome volume, containing the rules of our little society, set forth in all the pride of calligraphy. This was mean to inscribe Friendship's Gift, and present to her ladyship. If you wish it as I and Oliphant sup with her, it shall be done to-night. Depend upon it she will see how ridiculous she has become, and Milan will be too hot to hold her. If you wish to follow her, well and good; if not, I warrant you see her no more.'

'Follow her! I would as soon think of a pilgrimage to Mecca.'

Never shall I forget that night. Sullivan took out the volume from its silken envelope and promptly handed it to the unsuspecting countess, informing her at the same time that it was the joint gift of her English friends in Milan.

'You men are so vain,' she remarked; 'who would have thought of your giving me your own pictures' Here is a blank border—whose picture is that to contain?'

'Lord Mildworth's. If you will glance through the volume, you will find that none have been admitted but such as have an excuse for this vanity, in having received your own assurance of the highest friendly regard. Those pictures form the gallery of a society created by your ladyship, the rules of which are set forth in the beginning of the volume.'

I saw her, as she read, look bewildered, turn pale, drop the volume, and approach Sullivan as if she meant to strike him; but her rage gave way to mortification and shame, and she sunk on an ottoman in violent hysterics. Major Sullivan was cool, as I thought unfeelingly so, for the poor victim seemed alarmingly ill.

'Ring the bell Oliphant, and let us decamp.' However I persisted in remaining until her attendants came, and she was pronounced somewhat better. It was the last time I saw the Countess V. in Milan; she went, as we predicted, at day break the next morning. Sullivan keeps the volume of miniatures as a great curiosity.

This prank was only one of many played by the *Societa degli Amici*, which was not broken up by the loss of its patroness, but continued to fulfil its functions for several months. It then died a violent death by disbursement not